# The Post-US Withdrawal Conundrum

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Many speculative assumptions run through the South Asian region about the US retreat and its repercussions on Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. Without a shadow of a doubt, it seems palpable that Afghanistan will be dragged again into a state of chaos, turbulence and anarchy. History has so far remained harsh and unkind to that troubled country and every now and then the situation comes back to square-one. One wonders whether or not the US will be quitting Afghanistan for good. If so, then what is in store next in the kitty of US strategies? Many scholars, intellectuals and think tanks anticipate a purely Afghan civil war. On top of that, the time spent there by the US with all its underlying motives, with the support of exhaustive economic resources, will have been in vain. Then this simply means it was at its best a waste of time, energy, lives and resources on the part of the US.

Available views and research on Afghan society provide a range of lenses through which to view the possible future of Afghanistan, most of which are bleak, barren and gloomy. Half of the game plan is already on the move — I refer of course, to the election's outcome, which is just around the corner. So far Karzai has acted wilfully to his master and will continue to do so. Nonetheless, recent resentment against US demands could prove to be expensive for Kabul. More likely still, the next government will be another dummy setup installed on the dictation of the US. Even if Karzai otherwise uses his own political influence in the presidential elections, the ill-fate of the Afghan people will still stay in the dust and ashes of the years to follow. Taliban empowerment, as always, remained like a thunderstorm for the US, and Washington will unlikely let them grow again to become a monster. Over 60 percent turnout in the elections already assures the downfall of the Taliban. Still, the Taliban could get hold of the Pashtun belt. Restricting the Taliban would be more conducive for US strategists, while simultaneously preventing any backing or fuelling towards Talibanisation.

The US departure could at the same time have drastic implications for Pakistan. Unfortunately, Islamabad as usual seems to be in the whirlpool of ifs and buts, and no firm stance is coming to the surface. Savvy foreign policymakers, political scientists and the military establishment must come to the fore with visionary goals to cope with what could become an alarming situation. If the matter is handled sluggishly the situation could go from bad to worse in the near future. India's much-awaited elections could also play a cardinal role and one has to wait and see how Indian influence in Afghanistan is going to shape up. India is the fifth biggest donor to the reconstruction and rehabilitation process in Afghanistan. This could bring a double advantage to India, i.e. economic stability and an alliance against Pakistan. For national security measures, Islamabad must remain vigilant to secure its northwest border to sustain peace and avoid cross-border terrorism. China's foreign policy in case of a civil war in Afghanistan is still unclear. Meanwhile, Beijing is busy promoting economic cooperation and continues to build infrastructure and roads. Even a continuation of bilateral trade depends on the state of the volatility period. Unrest in Afghanistan could put a full stop to China's successful economic ascendance.

Iran, as a neighbouring state, is highly concerned about the post-withdrawal scenario in Afghanistan. It has vowed nearly one billion dollars in aid at international aid conferences held to help Afghanistan, and its aid in the first decade after the Taliban's ouster was estimated at about 12 percent of the total assistance for reconstruction and development. Tehran and Kabul have multiple disputes over water, Afghan refugees and drug trafficking, which has by far the greatest priority. Tehran equally blames Kabul and Washington for not shutting down the production of opium. One should remember that Iran is a major corridor for narcotics smuggling to Middle Eastern and other European countries. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran claims to have lost more than 3,700 members of security forces fighting drug traffickers, many of whom were heavily armed. Tehran estimates that it spends around one billion dollars annually on its war on drugs.

To put forward an analytical conclusion, Washington has to play an anchoring role before walking out and must leave behind peace, tranquility and stability in Afghanistan. This depends chiefly on whether economic aid will be sufficient for Afghanistan to run its military affairs and secure the state from insurgency and internal turmoil. As for neighbouring states, post-withdrawal Afghanistan will require them to pursue their foreign policies with the utmost care. India, China, Pakistan and Iran — all of them need to bury their animosities and grudges and join their heads together to avoid another conflict in the region. Peace is the only way forward for a prosperous and stable South Asia. War will open up new dimensions of threat and insecurity for the region.